

**Worksheet**  
**Documentation of Land Use Plan Conformance and NEPA Adequacy (DNA)**

**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
**Bureau of Land Management**  
**Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office**

**DNA-CA-660-05-79**

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**A. BLM Office:** Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office

**Lease/Serial/Case File No.:** CA-660-SRP-04-02

**Proposed Action Title/Type:** Amendment: Special Recreation Permit,  
Commercial

**Location of Proposed Action:** Mecca Hills

**Applicant:** Evan Trubee, *Big Wheel Bike Tours*

**Description of Proposed Action:**

*Big Wheel Bike Tours* proposes to conduct commercial vehicle and bicycle tours on the Meccacopia Trail, and commercial vehicle tours on the Red Canyon Jeep Trail in the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains, respectively, for the period of October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2009. These tours would amend *Big Wheel Bike Tours*' existing Special Recreation Permit CA-660-SRP-04-02. *Big Wheel Bike Tours* also proposes to modify its existing Special Recreation Permit to allow two bicycle tours of 50 riders each on Box Canyon Road per day instead of one tour of 100 riders per day as currently approved. Details of the proposal are described below. Proposed stipulations are incorporated by reference (see attachment).

- **Meccacopia Trail Tour** (see SRP-04-02 Amendment Map 2). Customers would be transported from the Coachella Valley via Interstate Highway 10/Box Canyon Road or Highway 111/North Shore/"Drop 31" to the northern or southern terminus, respectively, of the Meccacopia Trail. An alternate wash route that leads to the northern segment of the Meccacopia Trail from Box Canyon Road would also be used on occasion. Tours would proceed south or north through a corridor that separates the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountain Wildernesses, depending on where tours begin. Tours on the segment of the Meccacopia Trail that forms a corridor between the two wilderness areas would not occur from June 1 through September 30. This restriction is consistent with the route designation of "limited" in accordance with the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (2002), an amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (1980). Vehicles and bicycles would remain on the approved route; use of other routes and cross-country travel would not be allowed.

No more than five vehicles would be utilized at any one time for vehicle tours. The maximum tour size for both vehicle and bicycle tours would be 30 individuals, including *Big Wheel Bike Tours*' guides/drivers. No more than one Meccacopia Trail tour per day would occur, whether a vehicle tour or bicycle tour. Customers on vehicle tours would be allowed to periodically step out of vehicles. Pedestrian access into designated wilderness would not be allowed for both vehicle and bicycle tours. Water and food would be provided by *Big Wheel Bike Tours* for its customers. No sanitary facilities would be provided on public lands.

*Bicycle tour operations only:* At least one guide would be provided for every 10 riders. A vehicle and trailer with spare bicycles, tools, and refreshments would follow the riders; buses used to transport customers to and from the area would not follow riders on the Meccacopia Trail. All riders would be required to wear a helmet.

- **Red Canyon Vehicle Tour** (see SRP-04-02 Amendment Map 3). *Big Wheel Bike Tours* is currently permitted by BLM to conduct commercial bicycle tours on the Red Canyon Jeep Trail (Special Recreation Permit CA-660-SRP-04-02). The proposal herein addressed regards vehicle tours on the same route.

Customers would be transported to the site from the Coachella Valley via Interstate Highway 10, exiting at Chiriaco Summit. The tour would then proceed west on the Interstate 10 frontage road before turning south onto the Red Canyon Jeep Trail, a dirt road. The tour would proceed generally southeast through a corridor that separates the main body of the Orocopia Mountains Wilderness from a much smaller disjunct portion to the northeast. At the southern terminus of the Red Canyon Jeep Trail, the tour would proceed either northeast to Interstate 10 via Summit and Red Cloud Roads, or southwest to the community of North Shore via the Bradshaw Trail. Vehicles would remain on the approved route; use of other routes and cross-country travel would not be allowed.

No more than five vehicles would be utilized at any one time for the Red Canyon vehicle tour. The maximum tour size would be 30 individuals, including *Big Wheel Bike Tours*' guides/drivers. No more than one Red Canyon vehicle tour per day would occur. Customers would be allowed to periodically step out of vehicles, though pedestrian access into designated wilderness would not be allowed. Water and food would be provided by *Big Wheel Bike Tours* for its customers. No sanitary facilities would be provided on public lands.

- **Box Canyon Bicycle Tour** (see SRP-04-02 Amendment Map 4). *Big Wheel Bike Tours* has requested a modification to its existing Special Recreation Permit CA-660-SRP-04-02 to allow two bicycle tours per day with each tour not exceeding fifty (50) customers instead of one tour per day with each tour not exceeding one hundred (100) customers as is currently allowed. In addition, *Big Wheel Bike Tours* has requested deletion of its current permit provision allowing for bicycle use of public lands on the Interstate Highway 10 frontage road between Chiriaco Summit and Box Canyon Road in order to

reduce its use fee by reducing the percentage of public lands utilized for this tour. To date, this segment of the approved tour route has not been used by *Big Wheel Bike Tours*.

In accordance with the current permit, which would not be modified except as described above, customers would be transported to the intersection of Interstate Highway 10 and Box Canyon Road, then travel on bicycles generally west-southwest on Box Canyon Road to a roadside location on private lands just past the Coachella Canal where the tour would end and vehicles would meet them for the return trip to the Coachella Valley. En route, riders would take a scheduled rest break at Shavers Well. Tours may include a hike to Sheep Hole Oasis (located in the Mecca Hills Wilderness east of Box Canyon Road), but no more than 48 individuals, including tour guides, would be allowed to enter the Wilderness per day. Hikers would remain on the established trail; bicycles would not be allowed within the Mecca Hills Wilderness.

At least one guide would be provided for every 10 riders. Bicyclists would be restricted to the approved route, except when necessary to pull off the road for the scheduled rest break at Shavers Well, the hike to Sheep Hole Oasis, or to stop for other reasons. A vehicle and trailer with spare bicycles, tools, and refreshments would follow the riders; buses used to transport customers to and from the area would not follow riders through Box Canyon. No sanitary facilities would be provided on public lands. All riders would be required to wear a helmet.

**B. Conformance with the Land Use Plan (LUP) and Consistency with Related Subordinate Implementation Plans**

<b>LUP Name</b>	California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980), as amended
<b>LUP Name</b>	Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (NECO Plan, 2002), an amendment to the CDCA Plan
<b>LUP Name</b>	California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (2002)
<b>Other documents</b>	None applicable

**The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decisions (objectives, terms, and conditions) and, if applicable, implementation plan decisions:**

Public lands designated Multiple-Class “C” (Controlled Use) through the CDCA Plan, as amended, are those which have been formally designated as wilderness by Congress. These lands are administered in accordance with the provisions of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 which, in turn, requires that such

lands be administered in accordance with the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Wilderness Act requires the administering agency to preserve the wilderness character of such areas, and to devote these areas to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use. The Wilderness Act generally prohibits commercial enterprise. However, “commercial services may be performed . . . to the extent necessary for activities which are proper for realizing the recreational . . . purposes of the area” (Section 4[d][6]).

Class “C” lands are suitable for non-mechanical types of recreational experience which generally involve low to very low user densities. Motorized-vehicle use is generally not allowed unless provided for in individual wilderness legislation and management plans or if necessary to serve valid existing rights, and for emergency use for public safety, or protection of wilderness values. Trails are open for non-vehicle use in Class “C” areas; mechanized transport, such as bicycles, is prohibited.

Public lands designated Multiple-Use Class “L” (Limited Use) through the CDCA Plan, as amended, are managed to provide for generally lower-intensity, carefully controlled multiple use of resources, while ensuring that sensitive values are not significantly diminished. This class is suitable for recreation which generally involves low to moderate user densities. Motorized-vehicle use is allowed on approved routes of travel, and trails are open for non-vehicle use in Class “L” areas.

Public lands designated Multiple-Use Class “M” (Moderate Use) through the CDCA Plan, as amended, are managed to provide for higher intensity use while conserving desert resources. This class is suitable for a wide range of recreation activities which may involve moderate to high user densities. Motorized-vehicle use is allowed on approved routes of travel, and trails are open for non-vehicle use in Class “M” areas.

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The Meccacopia Trail tour would occur on public lands designated as Multiple-Class “L” and “M.” A portion of the Meccacopia Trail between the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses was designated “limited” through the NECO Plan; motorized-vehicle travel on this segment of the route is prohibited from June 1 through September 30. The remainder of the route was designated “open” whereupon motorized-vehicle use is allowed year-round. The entire route constitutes a “trail” open for non-vehicle use on a year-round basis. The Proposed Action is in conformance with the route designations for motorized-vehicle access, as well as management prescriptions regarding non-vehicle use.

The Red Canyon vehicle tour would occur on public lands designated as Multiple-Use Class “L.” The Red Canyon Jeep Trail was designated “open” through the NECO Plan; motorized-vehicle travel on this route is allowed year-round. The entire route constitutes a “trail” open for year-round non-vehicle use. The Proposed Action is in conformance with the route designations for motorized-vehicle access, as well as management prescriptions regarding non-vehicle use.

The Box Canyon bicycle tour conducted by *Big Wheel Bike Tours*, as approved by BLM, currently occurs on public lands designated “L” and “C.” Box Canyon Road (Highway 195) is an open route, but as a public paved highway, it is not subject to route designation decisions through the LUP. The guided hikes provided by *Big Wheel Bike Tours* on the Sheep Hole Oasis Trail in the Mecca Hills Wilderness meet the statutory standard for acceptable/appropriate commercial service by promoting the primitive and unconfined types of recreation available locally only in wilderness. As described in Environmental Assessment CA-660-05-08—*Elite Land Tours / Special Recreation Permit, Commercial*—hiking tours at the proposed level are not anticipated to substantially preclude or adversely affect opportunities for solitude and/or primitive types of recreation in the Mecca Hills Wilderness for either the general public or customers of the operator. The Proposed Action is in conformance with non-vehicle Multiple-Use Class guidelines, as well as statutory requirements regarding use of designated wilderness.

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A portion of the Meccacopia Trail tour, all of the Red Canyon vehicle tour, and a portion of the Box Canyon bicycle tour would occur within the Chuckwalla Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA)—an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)—established through the NECO Plan to protect desert tortoise and significant natural resources including special status plant and animal species and natural communities. In addition, portions of all three tours would occur within the Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) for the Sonoran Desert Bighorn Sheep Metapopulation, established through the NECO Plan to protect essential habitat for desert bighorn sheep. LUP prescriptions relating the Proposed Action are limited to route designation, and restrictions on stopping and parking vehicles. The Proposed Action is in conformance with route designation decisions for the Meccacopia Trail and Red Canyon Jeep Trail, as well as restrictions on stopping and parking within DWMA's.

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The Meccacopia Trail tour, Red Canyon vehicle tour, and Box Canyon bicycle tour would occur primarily in a desert scrub community habitat type, though portions would occur in a dry wash woodland habitat type. Habitat conservation objectives for these vegetative community types were established through the CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley based on the habitat needs for sensitive species which occupy the various community types. The Proposed Action through incorporation of specific mitigation measures to minimize potential for adverse impacts conforms to these habitat conservation objectives.

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The LUP indicates that a goal of the recreation element is to provide for a wide range of quality recreation opportunities and experiences emphasizing dispersed undeveloped use, and a primary consideration of the recreation program is to ensure that access routes necessary for recreation enjoyment are provided. Commercial jeep and hiking tours provide quality recreation opportunities that

incorporate educational components addressing the natural and cultural histories of the public lands.

**C. Applicable NEPA documents and other related documents that cover the proposed action**

**1. Applicable NEPA documents that cover the proposed action:**

Environmental Assessment CA-660-04-60, prepared in response to an application submitted by *Big Wheel Bike Tours* to conduct commercial vehicle, bicycle, and hiking tours on public lands in the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, including bicycle tours on the Red Canyon Jeep Trail and Box Canyon Road; reviewed by the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office Environmental Coordinator on November 15, 2004. The Decision Record was signed by the California Desert District Manager on December 13, 2004.

Environmental Assessment CA-660-05-08, prepared in response to an application submitted by *Elite Land Tours, Inc.* to conduct commercial vehicle and hiking tours on public lands in the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains, including vehicle tours on the Meccacopia Trail, the Red Canyon Jeep Trail and a portion of Box Canyon Road; reviewed by the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office Environmental Coordinator on February 2, 2005. The Decision Record was signed by the California Desert District Manager on February 11, 2005.

**2. Other documentation relevant to the proposed action (e.g., source drinking water assessments, biological assessment, biological opinion, watershed assessment, allotment evaluation, rangeland health standards assessment and determinations, and monitoring reports):**

- a. Biological Opinion for Small Projects Affecting Desert Tortoise Habitat in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, California (1-8-97-F-17, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); August 22, 1997.
- b. Biological Opinion for the California Desert Conservation Area Plan [Desert Tortoise] (1-8-01-F-16, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); June 17, 2002.
- c. Endangered Species Consultation/Conference on the Effects of the Proposed California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley on 10 Listed Plants and Animals and one Proposed Species, Riverside County, California (FWS-ERIV-3066.2); December 24, 2002.
- d. Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) CA-660-04-06, *Big Wheel Bike Tours*; August 13, 2004.

- e. Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) CA-660-05-03, *Elite Land Tours, Inc.*; November 15, 2004.
- f. Findings and Determinations for Historic Properties, *Big Wheel Bike Tours*; November 29, 2004.
- g. Findings and Determinations for Historic Properties, *Elite Land Tours, Inc.*; February 4, 2005.
- h. Biological Opinion for the California Desert Conservation Area Plan [Desert Tortoise] (1-8-04-F-43R, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); March 31, 2005.

**D. NEPA Adequacy Criteria**

**1. Is the current proposed action substantially the same action (or is a part of that action) as previously analyzed?**

Yes. The Proposed Action is identical to a part of the Proposed Action addressed by Environmental Assessment CA-660-05-08 (*Elite Land Tours, Inc.*) as mitigated per Decision Record of February 11, 2005, and is identical to a part of the Proposed Action addressed by Environmental Assessment CA-660-04-60 (*Big Wheel Bike Tours*) as mitigated per Decision Record of December 13, 2004.

Environmental Assessment CA-660-05-08 addressed a proposal to conduct vehicle tours on the Meccacopia Trail, Red Canyon Jeep Trail and a portion of Box Canyon Road; no more than five vehicles accommodating 30 individuals would be utilized per tour per day. In addition, the Environmental Assessment addressed a proposal to conduct hiking tours in the Mecca Hills Wilderness via the Sheep Hole Oasis Trail; no more than 30 individuals per day would be allowed to enter the Wilderness. The proposal addressed by this DNA would allow no more than five vehicles and 30 individuals per vehicle tour per day, or 30 individuals per bicycle tour per day on the Meccacopia Trail; and no more than five vehicles and 30 individuals per vehicle tour per day on the Red Canyon Jeep Trail.

Environmental Assessment CA-660-04-60 addressed a proposal to conduct bicycle tours on Box Canyon Road; no more than 100 customers per tour per day would be allowed. In addition, the Environmental Assessment addressed a proposal to conduct hiking tours in the Mecca Hills Wilderness via the Sheep Hole Oasis Trail; no more than 48 individuals per day would be allowed to enter the Wilderness in conjunction with Box Canyon bicycle tours, and no more than 48 individuals per day would be allowed to enter the Wilderness in conjunction with Box Canyon/Painted Canyon driving and hiking tours. The proposal addressed by this DNA would allow no more than 100 customers per tour per day on Box Canyon Road, though two tours per day would be used to accommodate the 100 customers instead of one tour as currently approved. The proposal addressed by this DNA would also allow no more than 48 individuals per day to enter the Mecca Hills Wilderness via the Sheep Hole Oasis Trail; this proposal is

identical to the one addressed by Environmental Assessment CA-660-04-60 in this regard.

- 2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA documents appropriate with respect to the current proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, resource values, and circumstances?**

Yes. Since issuance of Special Recreation Permit CA-660-SRP-05-01 to *Elite Land Tours, Inc.* on February 17, 2005, and Special Recreation Permit CA-660-SRP-04-02 to *Big Wheel Bike Tours* on January 19, 2005, environmental concerns, interests, and resource values are not known to have changed. Hence, the range of alternatives previously analyzed is appropriate.

- 3. Is the existing analysis adequate and are the conclusions adequate in light of any new information or circumstances (including, for example, riparian proper functioning conditioning [PFC] reports; rangeland health standards assessments; Unified Watershed Assessment categorizations; inventory and monitoring data; most recent Fish and Wildlife Service lists of threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species; and most recent BLM lists of sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that all new information and all new circumstances are insignificant with regard to analysis of the proposed action?**

Yes. The existing analyses in the two Environmental Assessments upon which this DNA is based, which were prepared less than one year prior to the DNA, are adequate. No new information or circumstances are known that would have relevance to the Proposed Action.

- 4. Do the methodology and analytical approach used in the existing NEPA documents continue to be appropriate for the current proposed action?**

Yes. There is no reason to conclude that the methodology and analytical approach used in Environmental Assessments CA-660-04-60 and CA-660-05-08 is inappropriate for the current Proposed Action. No new technologies or methodologies have been identified that would alter the analyses and potentially lead to a different decision.

- 5. Are the direct and indirect impacts of the current proposed action substantially unchanged from those identified in the existing NEPA documents? Do the existing NEPA documents sufficiently analyze site-specific impacts related to the current proposed action?**

Yes. Direct and indirect impacts and site-specific impacts of the previously proposed actions were addressed in Environmental Assessments CA-660-04-60 and CA-660-05-08. As the current Proposed Action is, in part, identical to portions of the approved mitigated actions addressed by Environmental Assessments CA-660-04-60 and CA-660-05-08, and environmental concerns,



interests, resource values, and circumstances are not known to have significantly changed since these Environmental Assessments were prepared, it is anticipated that the impacts would be substantially unchanged from those previously identified.

**6. Can you conclude without additional analysis or information that the cumulative impacts that would result from implementation of the current proposed action are substantially unchanged from those analyzed in the existing NEPA documents?**

Yes. Reports of commercial activities on the Meccacopia Trail by *Elite Land Tours, Inc.*, and on Red Canyon Jeep Trail by both *Elite Land Tours, Inc.* and *Big Wheel Bike Tours* demonstrate that allowable use in accordance with Special Recreation Permits CA-660-SRP-05-01 and CA-660-SRP-04-02, respectively, substantially exceeds actual use. Since issuance of a Special Recreation Permit to *Elite Land Tours, Inc.* on February 17, 2005, and issuance of a Special Recreation Permit to *Big Wheel Bike Tours* on January 19, 2005, only 65 customers have been accommodated on the Meccacopia Trail, 4 customers on the Red Canyon Jeep Trail, and 354 customers on Box Canyon Road through the end of June 2005, with a portion of the Box Canyon Road customers entering the Mecca Hills Wilderness via the Sheep Hole Oasis Trail. (These data reflect a 133-day period under permit for *Elite Land Tours, Inc.* and a 162-day period under permit for *Big Wheel Bike Tours.*) However, the Environmental Assessments in combination analyzed the potential for 3,325 customers on the Meccacopia Trail (with 2,575 only allowed on the limited segment between the Mecca Hills and Orocopia Mountains Wildernesses), 4,459 customers on the Red Canyon Jeep Trail, and 19,525 customers on Box Canyon Road during the same period, with 19,542 individuals potentially entering the Mecca Hill Wilderness via the Sheep Hole Oasis Trail. It is not anticipated that the additional proposed tours addressed by this DNA would likely reach previously analyzed levels of cumulative potential use. Therefore, the cumulative impacts that would result from implementation of the current Proposed Action would be substantially unchanged from those analyzed in the existing NEPA documents.

**7. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with the existing NEPA documents adequate for the current Proposed Action?**

Yes. Through the Notices of Proposed Action (NOPAs) distributed in August and November of 2004, individuals interested in BLM actions within designated wilderness were informed of the previous proposals. No comments were received. Also, the Torres-Martinez Band of Desert Cahuilla Indians, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians, and Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians were consulted; no concerns were expressed by any of these tribes.

**E. Interdisciplinary Analysis**

Team members conducting or participating in the preparation of this worksheet:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Resource Represented</u>
Jim Foote	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Wanda Raschkow	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources
Mark Massar	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife
Justin Seastrand	Wilderness Specialist	Wilderness

**F. Mitigation Measures**

Mitigation measures that were identified and analyzed in the applicable NEPA documents (Environmental Assessments CA-660-04-60 and CA-660-05-08), approved in the associated Decision Records (December 13, 2004 and February 11, 2005, respectively), and amended to address the Proposed Action have been incorporated as stipulations by reference (see Appendix).

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the applicable land use plan and that the existing NEPA documentation fully covers the Proposed Action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of NEPA.

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**Signature of the Responsible Official**

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**Date**